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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement submitted by the African Women's Development and Communication Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

The statement was prepared during the Africa Women's NGO Consultative Meeting, convened in the margins of the 8th Africa Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15) on 15 and 16 November 2009 in Banjul.

Preamble:

We, the representatives of various civil society organizations assembled as the African Women's Caucus attending the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2010 and also representing the voices of millions of African women, youth and girls,

Having widely consulted with different stakeholders prior to and during the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Africa since the last review (Beijing +10),

Having reviewed the Africa Regional NGO shadow report on Beijing +15, which incorporates national and subregional reviews from women's civil society organizations and networks,

Recognizing that the Beijing +15 review process is taking place at a time of both great opportunity and challenge for African women in the realization of their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights,

Considering with great concern that although the process of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the past 15 years has utilized significant resources, progress has remained minimal, slow and fragmented and has not resulted in fundamental changes in the lives of the majority of women in Africa,

Noting that the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and human rights instruments that reinforce its provisions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, involves a range of stakeholders, and that the primary responsibility rests with the Member States of the United Nations,

Also noting that the Beijing commitments have been repeatedly articulated as human rights guarantees that States parties are obligated to protect, promote and fulfil to the fullest extent possible, and that this requires visible and consistent political will and resources in order to deliver on this agenda,

We therefore highlight the following actions, among others specified in the Beijing +15 Africa NGO shadow report, as an urgent call on Governments in Africa to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the next five years:

(a) Ensure universal ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, as an indication of political commitment to human rights standards, and urgently domesticate in full the instruments on women's rights to provide a legal basis for protecting, fulfilling and enforcing provisions on women's social and economic rights in particular;

(b) Accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and all women's rights commitments through a multisectoral approach, that States committed to in Beijing in 1995, by the end of the first three years of the Africa Women's Decade;

(c) Ensure that structures established to lead the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda have adequate resources, as an indication of Member States' political commitment to women's advancement;

(d) Ratify the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, harmonize the electoral laws and democratic structures with its provisions and consistently implement the African Union gender parity commitments at national and local governance levels by 2015;

(e) Ensure that electoral and policy reforms are fully implemented to guarantee women's full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making in terms of equal representation, participation in political parties and as key stakeholders in the democratic processes of their countries;

(f) Allocate funds from the African Union Women's Fund for training and education programmes for women politicians aspiring for elected positions, as a priority, to enhance their capacities to effectively participate in and influence decision-making processes;

(g) Take deliberate efforts to nominate female candidates for the position of Chairperson of the African Union Commission as a sign of equal sharing of leadership and responsibilities for delivering on the development agenda in Africa;

(h) Enact freedom of information legislation, in line with internationally accepted human rights principles and standards, in order to guarantee citizens' access to critical information, in particular African women, to facilitate their full and effective participation in governance, democratic processes and development;

(i) Urgently implement their commitments to change attitudes and practices that negatively impact on the protection, promotion and fulfilment of women's rights by using the media, inter alia, as a powerful tool for building public and targeted awareness and education on women's rights and advancement;

(j) Meet reporting requirements on progress made towards gender equality in Africa and where there is non-compliance and call upon the African Union to institute additional mechanisms for ensuring accountability under the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004);

(k) Address the burning issue of impunity in Africa with regard to violations of human rights of African citizens, particularly violence against women and children in conflict situations, and ensure fulfilment of commitments to protect women and children from all forms of violence;

(l) Prioritize women's health as a human rights issue, particularly maternal, sexual and reproductive health, as a critical component of sustainable development in Africa, and intensify actions to reduce the feminization of HIV/AIDS;

(m) Invest in women's education with particular attention to science and technology training, to ensure that African women benefit from the changing global technology framework;

(n) Build the capacity of rural women in agriculture and strengthen women's land rights as part of the process of implementing the New Partnership for Africa's Development Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme and the African Union Land Policy Framework and Guidelines;

(o) Invest in research on climate change in Africa and its implications for women, address gender dimensions with respect to mitigation, adaptability, response and compensation mechanisms, and invest in research and technology on clean and renewable energy sources, ensuring that gender analysis is integrated;

(p) Desist from engaging in bilateral and international trade and economic agreements that undermine the regional integration process and impact negatively on women's rights and advancement;

(q) Invest in women's entrepreneurship for effective economic empowerment, eliminate barriers to women starting businesses and small/medium enterprises, and commit sufficient resources to infrastructural development that facilitates trade within countries and across borders in the region;

(r) Ensure that gender equality is incorporated in all planning and budgeting processes at different levels, and also ensure the deliberate development of sex-disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators, as one of the ways to guarantee effective implementation of all the Beijing commitments and as a strategy for promoting, protecting and fulfilling the right of African women to development.